

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, while American troops are fighting over in Iraq, veterans of past wars are fighting a different battle here in the United States. These veterans, who sacrificed a great deal to serve their Nation with great distinction, are now essentially being told by the House Republicans, "thanks for your service, but we are going to have to make major cuts in your health care and other services to pay for our huge tax cut for the wealthiest few."

Last month, House Republicans approved a budget by the slimmest of margins that cuts \$14.2 billion in veterans programs over the next 10 years. Upon hearing that veterans were not a priority of the Republican majority, several leaders of veterans groups sent letters to Republican leaders.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read some excerpts from some of the letters sent to the Speaker, because I think they are so much on point.

The first one is from Edward Heath, the National Commander of Disabled American Veterans. If I could just quote some sections, Mr. Heath writes:

"I write today on behalf of the 2.3 million disabled veterans, including the more than 1.2 million members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to communicate our deep-seated outrage regarding the fiscal year 2004 budget adopted by the House Budget Committee which would cut veterans programs by more than \$15 billion during the next 10 years.

"Has Congress no shame? Is there no honor left in the hallowed halls of our government that you choose to dishonor the sacrifices of our Nation's heroes and rob our programs, health care and disability compensation to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy? You will be reducing benefits and services for disabled veterans at a time when thousands of our servicemen are in harm's way fighting terrorists around the world and thousands more of our sons and daughters are preparing for war against Iraq.

"If you, in your leadership role in your House, allow this budget proposal to pass the House without exempting VA programs from the massive cuts, it could mean the loss of 19,000 nurses, equating to the loss of 6.6 million outpatient visits or more than three-quarters of a million hospital bed days. But that is not all of the devastation that will be caused by the proposed cuts. You will be reaching into the pockets of our Nation's service-connected veterans, including combat disabled veterans, and robbing them and their survivors of a portion of their compensation.

"Mr. Speaker, this budget dishonors the service of millions of service-connected disabled veterans, including combat disabled veterans, and seriously erodes the Nation's commitment to care for its defenders."

Mr. Edward Heath, the National Commander of Disabled American Veterans, goes on to talk about the really

negative impacts that these cuts will have.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to read sections from a letter that was sent to the chairman of the Committee on the Budget by Steve Robertson, Director, National Legislative Commission for the American Legion.

He says, "Dear Mr. Chairman: The American Legion is deeply troubled by the impact H. Con. Res. 95, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget, would have on veterans, especially severely service-connected disabled veterans and their families.

"Veterans did not cause the budgetary shortfalls and should not be financially penalized in the name of fiscal responsibility. Much has been said that all Americans must be willing to make sacrifices to eliminate the budget deficit. Severely service-connected disabled veterans have already made significant personal sacrifices for their earned entitlements."

Mr. Speaker, last is a letter to Speaker HASTERT from Joseph L. Fox, Sr., National President of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

He says in part, "Dear Mr. Speaker: The proposal, if implemented, would have a shocking effect on VA health care services and would be an affront to millions of veterans facing reductions in their health care, compensation, pension and education benefits.

"The House Budget Committee proposal also calls for cutting \$15 billion over 10 years, \$463 million in fiscal year 2004 alone, in VA mandatory spending under the guise of eliminating fraud, waste and abuse. We do not consider payments to war-disabled veterans, pensions for the poorest disabled veterans and GI Bill benefits for soldiers returning from Afghanistan to be "fraud, waste and abuse." Ninety percent of the spending for VA entitlements goes in monthly payments to these veterans and their survivors. The House Budget Committee plan, if approved, would force cuts in each of these programs."

Mr. Speaker, I am only mentioning these letters because I think it is much better to quote from some of the people who are involved as veterans, from veterans organizations, rather than speaking myself, in terms of the real impact of the cuts in the budgets on veterans programs.

I think the Republicans clearly were not listening to veterans last month when they approved the fiscal year 2004 budget. I hope today they will keep veterans' voices in when they have a chance to instruct budget conferees to restore the funds that they so callously took away last month.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is, we are in the middle of a war, and to cut veterans' programs at this time is definitely not the way we should go.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair

declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 4 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon today.

□ 1200

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO) at noon.

#### PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

I am grateful to the Members of the House of Representatives and all those who work here on Capitol Hill because they exist and because they are who they are. They do what they do and try as they may to make a difference in this place, in this Nation, and in this world.

I am grateful to You, O God, for having placed me among them and for having told me to be their father, their minister, their rabbi, a spiritual seeker with them in troublesome times.

Finally, I am grateful to You, O Lord, because in the midst of such public hearing and so much activity, I can find the solitude of prayer that shuts off the TV wars and simply questions the times in which we live and the priorities which set our motion.

In this most significant place, I find myself in them and with them, wondering what is the human dimension to government, to power, to war, and to life. I wonder, and I wonder further, and I wonder, until I come to You, our wonderful God. I wonder if You still recognize Yourself in us, for we were once made in Your image and likeness.

Amen.

#### THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KLINE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. KLINE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

#### U.S. WILL NOT EXCUSE WAR CRIMES OF IRAQI REGIME

(Mr. REHBERG asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)